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New, Elizabeth Anne

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tel: +44 1970 62 2400

email: is@aber.ac.uk

LLEISION AP MORGAN MAKES AN IMPRESSION: SEALS AND THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL WALES¹

ABSTRACT

Seals are a very important source of evidence for the social, political, economic and religious history of medieval Wales, but generally have received little attention from scholars. Drawing on the work of the recent Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Seals in Medieval Wales project, this article highlights their potential, and explores in detail the seals used by one Welsh noble family in Glamorgan in the context of the adoption of the seal as a means of documentary validation in medieval Wales and sealing practices amongst the native rulers and Anglo-Norman settlers of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In particular, it demonstrates that, when considered in conjunction with a range of associated material, the principal motifs employed on seals can reveal fascinating and important insights into a rapidly changing society.

The phrase *sigillum meum apposui* is familiar to medieval scholars, but apart from noting whether a seal is still attached to the document this rarely prompts further thought. Yet seals offer valuable, sometimes crucial, evidence for the study of the Middle Ages. Indeed, to paraphrase Michel Pastoureau, seals are one of the most important sources of information for a study of pre-modern Europe.² The basis for such a claim is that, unlike many other sources, we usually know when, where, for what reason and by whom a seal was used. Furthermore, as objects with both a legal application and a personal resonance, they offer crucial

¹ I would like to thank Professor Phillipp Schofield and Dr Eryn White for their helpful comments on drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to Professor Huw Pryce and the anonymous reviewer of this article for their valuable comments and advice.

² Michel Pastoureau, *Les sceaux. Typologie des sources du Moyen Age Occidental*, fasc. 36 (Turnhout, 1981), p. 62.

evidence for medievalists related to, among other things, legal and administrative practices, familial, social and political networks, religious allegiances, costume, buildings and developing technologies. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they allow glimpses into the mindset of their owners by being vehicles for expressing identity. For Wales in the Middle Ages, where sources are far from abundant, seals offer perhaps especial potential. In order to highlight some of the ways in which this material can be utilized to further the study of medieval Wales, this article will explore in detail the seals used by a Welsh noble family in Glamorgan in the context of sealing practices amongst the native rulers and Anglo-Norman settlers of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³



The word ‘seal’ is employed for a concept manifest through a motif and wording engraved into a matrix, an object made of a hard material, which is then applied to a plastic substance to create an impression. Seals were employed by different cultures in the ancient world and were used to authenticate and close documents across the Roman Empire, and they seem first to have appeared in Britain during the Roman period.⁴ The early fourth century AD witnessed a rapid and dramatic decline of the use of seals across the western parts of the Empire.⁵ The use of seals as part of administrative practice was preserved without a break in Europe only by the Byzantines.⁶ Nonetheless, Frankish and Germanic rulers had

³ This article draws upon the work of Seals in Medieval Wales, an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project based at Aberystwyth University; for further information see <http://www.aber.ac.uk/history/research/simew.html>; www.exploringmedievalseals.org. S. M. Johns, J. McEwan, E. A. New and P. R. Schofield, *Seals and Society: Medieval Wales and the Welsh Marches* (Cardiff, forthcoming) uses the project data to explore aspects of the social, political, economic and religious life of Wales and the English borderlands in the Middle Ages.

⁴ For introductions to seals in the ancient world, see Dominique Collon, *Near Eastern Seals* (Los Angeles, 1990); Martine Fabre, *Sceau Médiéval. Analyse d'une pratique culturelle* (Paris, 2001), pp. 22–9; and the essays by T. G. H. James, Asko Parpola, John H. Betts and John Boardman in Dominique Collon (ed.), *7000 Years of Seals* (London, 1997). For an introduction to Roman sealing practices, see Martin Henig, ‘Roman sealstones’, in Collon (ed.), *7000 Years of Seals*, pp. 88–106 (pp. 90–1).

⁵ Henig, ‘Roman sealstones’, pp. 90–1, 93.

⁶ There is a great deal of literature about Byzantine sealing practices; one of the most accessible introductions is Jean-Claude Cheynet, ‘Byzantine seals’, in Collon (ed.), *7000 Years of Seals*, pp. 107–23.

seals and documentary sealing was adopted by the Merovingian chancery, a practice continued by the Carolingians.⁷ The first non-royal documentary sealers in the medieval West were the ecclesiastical hierarchy, with the papal chancery issuing documents with a seal impression attached by the early seventh century, and bishops from the Frankish kingdoms validating documents with seals from the second half of the ninth century.⁸

Although there is no evidence of direct continuity of sealing practices from the Romano-British period, seals do appear in Britain during the early Middle Ages. A matrix inscribed *BALdE hILDIS*, dated on stylistic grounds to the later seventh century, a lead bulla of Cenwulf of Mercia (796–821), and the base-metal matrix with an elaborate handle of a Bishop Ethilwald (probably Æthelwold, bishop of East Anglia (active c.845–70)) are all evidence of this.⁹ While this places Britain in the European tradition of seal ownership, the question of how these seals were used is a challenging one. At the time of writing, all the available evidence suggests that, prior to the mid-eleventh century, seals in Britain were not used to validate written instruments in patent form, and that their principal functions were to close documents and to accompany documents or messengers as a means of corroboration.¹⁰ It was Edward

⁷ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 76–84. There is no clear evidence about how the seal-rings of rulers such as Childeric (d.481) and Clovis (d.511) were used: Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'Seals and sigillography, Western Europe', in Joseph R. Strayer (gen. ed.), *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 13 vols (New York, 1988), XI, pp. 123–31 (pp. 124–5).

⁸ John Cherry, 'Medieval and post-medieval seals', in Collon (ed.), *7000 Years of Seals*, pp. 124–42 (pp. 124–5); Bedos-Rezak, 'Seals and sigillography', p. 125.

⁹ Norfolk Museums & Archaeological Service NWHCM: L2003.7, recorded in E. Okasha, 'A third supplement to *Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 33 (2004), 225–81, no. 323; P. D. A. Harvey and Andrew McGuinness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals* (London, 1996), p. 4; T. A. Heslop, 'English seals from the mid ninth century to 1100', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 133 (1980), 1–16 (2–3).

¹⁰ Heslop, 'English seals from the mid ninth century', esp. 1, 15–16; Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'The king enthroned, a new theme in Anglo-Saxon royal iconography: the seal of Edward the Confessor and its political implications', in Joel T. Rosenthal (ed.), *Kings and Kingship* (New York, 1986), pp. 53–88 (reprinted in Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, *Form and Order in Medieval France* (Aldershot, 1993), section IV), esp. pp. 53–6; Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide*, pp. 3–4; Cherry, 'Medieval and post-medieval', pp. 124–5; Elizabeth A. New, *Seals and Sealing Practices*, British Records Association Archives and the User series, 11 (London, 2010), pp. 3–5.

the Confessor (1042–66) who ‘effected a revolution in sealing’ in Britain by introducing the seal of validation.¹¹ This brought the kingdom of the English into line with French and Imperial sealing practices, but as well as administrative procedures Edward also adopted European motifs in the design of his seal, with the seated majesty image drawing on French, Germanic and even Byzantine traditions.¹²

By the early twelfth century leading ecclesiastics and secular magnates in Britain had begun to use seals as a means of validation, and from the latter part of the twelfth century we see a dramatic increase in the number and social range of seal users across Britain.¹³ The rapid surge in the use of seals was both in response to and part of the proliferation of written documentation in this period.¹⁴ In Wales this appears to have been fostered especially by the new religious houses, principally the Cistercians, who were keen to obtain a permanent record of exchanges and provided the means of producing written documentation.¹⁵

The production of a written record of an agreement or exchange was of course not an innovation in medieval Wales but, as A. D. Carr, among others, has noted, the sealed instrument introduced a new way of

¹¹ Heslop, ‘English seals from the mid ninth century’, 9; see also Bedos-Rezak, ‘The king enthroned’, esp. pp. 54–6. Bedos-Rezak notes that medieval sources refer to Edward the Confessor being the first English ruler to seal patent as a means of validation.

¹² Bedos-Rezak, ‘The king enthroned’, esp. pp. 62–6.

¹³ Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide*, p. 77; J. McEwan, ‘The early history of medieval seals’, in John McEwan and Elizabeth A. New (eds), *Seals in Context: Medieval Wales and the Welsh Marches* (Aberystwyth, 2012), pp. 31–3 (p. 31).

¹⁴ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1993), pp. 44–74.

¹⁵ A. D. Carr, ‘“This my act and deed”: the writing of private deeds in late medieval north Wales’, in Huw Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 223–37 (p. 224); McEwan, ‘Early history’, in *Seals in Context*, pp. 33, 34; Robert B. Patterson, *The Scriptorium of Margam Abbey and the Scribes of Early Angevin Glamorgan: Secretarial Administration in a Welsh Marcher Barony, c.1150–c.1225* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 62–3. For an exploration of ‘Anglo-Norman’ style charters in the context of secular power in twelfth-century Wales see Huw Pryce, ‘Culture, power and the charters of Welsh rulers’, in Marie Therese Flanagan and Judith A. Green (eds), *Charters and Charter Scholarship in Britain and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 184–202. It has been suggested that the adoption of the European-style charter by the Irish kings was a result of the Church reform movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and that here too Cistercian houses played an important role in this: Marie Therese Flanagan, ‘Irish royal charters and the Cistercian Order’, in Flanagan and Green (eds), *Charters and Charter Scholarship*, pp. 120–39.

confirming proof in perpetuity.¹⁶ The use of seals as a means of authentication integral to the written instrument in Wales appears to begin in the second quarter of the twelfth century, and the earliest extant seal of validation of a native Welshman so far identified is an impression of the seal of Cadell ap Gruffudd (d.1175), ruler of Deheubarth, appended to a document dated 1146 × 1151.¹⁷ From the mid-1150s onwards documents associated with religious houses in Wales (notably Margam Abbey in Glamorgan and Ystrad Marchell in Powys) were validated with seals, both those of Anglo-Norman settlers and those of native Welshmen, with what appears to be increasing frequency.¹⁸ This is not to say that everyone suddenly acquired seals in the latter part of the twelfth century, and in this period it is not uncommon to find documents validated with another person or institution's seal because the principal party did not have one of their own. For example, the late twelfth-century grant of Caradog *Verbeis* to the Cistercian Order, Brother Meilyr and the brethren of Pendar was validated with the seal of Morgan ap Caradog his lord because Caradog *Verbeis* had no seal of his own.¹⁹

¹⁶ For the production of written confirmation of agreements in Wales before the twelfth century see, for example, Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979), esp. p. 6. The use of seals of validation within the framework of Welsh law in the pre-Conquest period is an exciting area for further research. The adoption of the sealed instrument in Wales has been discussed in the context of a later medieval literary culture in Llinos Beverley Smith, 'Inkhorn and spectacles: the impact of literacy in late medieval Wales', in Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, pp. 202–22, and Carr, "'This my act and deed'", esp. p. 223. Smith notes that very few deeds or charters survive from medieval Ceredigion or Carmarthenshire and suggests that this may reflect the late adoption of the sealed instrument in these areas: Smith, 'Inkhorn and spectacles', p. 215. This view is supported by the work of the Seals in Medieval Wales project which recorded only a few seals from Carmarthenshire and none from central or northern Ceredigion, although Glyn Parry and Dr Susan Davies have suggested that some medieval Aberystwyth borough material may survive in the National Library of Wales Gogerddan Deeds collection.

¹⁷ David Crouch, 'The earliest original charter of a Welsh king', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 26 (1989), 125–31; the seal is discussed on p. 130. Huw Pryce (ed.), *The Acts of Welsh Rulers 1120–1283* (Cardiff, 2005), no. 22. The grant was made to Totnes Priory in Devon; Crouch dates this to 1146 × 1154, Pryce to 1146 × 1151.

¹⁸ McEwan, 'Early history', pp. 33–4, 42. The early use of seals and adoption of the sealed instrument in Wales is examined in detail by Dr John McEwan in Johns, McEwan, New and Schofield, *Seals and Society*.

¹⁹ [Aberystwyth], N[atational] L[ibrary of] W[ales], Penrice & Margam ch. 54. The charter is discussed in Walter de Gray Birch, *A History of Margam Abbey*

Another grant, made by Gunnilda, wife of Roger Sturmy, to Margam Abbey in the later twelfth century was validated with the seals of the chapter of Llandaff Cathedral and William, archdeacon of Llandaff; although the document does not explicitly state the reason for this, the assumption must be that it was because Gunnilda had no seal of her own.²⁰ While such instances of the use of another's seal continued into the thirteenth century, there is a clear and quite dramatic increase in the number of extant sealed instruments and range of seal users in much of southern, eastern and north-eastern Wales and across the border lands in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The evidence certainly indicates that this period witnessed a transition to a 'sealing society' in at least some areas of Wales.



A seal, unlike a sign-manual, is, however, not simply an element of documentary authentication. The matrix, which is capable of creating numerous identical impressions, exists independently of the document and was usually retained by its owner. Furthermore, the words and motif engraved into a matrix, the 'essence' of the seal, serve to identify and represent an individual or community, and operate within the semiotic framework of the society in which they are produced.²¹ The seal was and is a vehicle through which identity could be formulated and expressed.

The principal motif adopted for their seals by the native Welsh rulers and both the Welsh and Anglo-Norman nobility in Wales and the Marches was the armed equestrian figure. This use of a representation of an armed horseman as the principal image on the seals of leading Welshmen and Marcher lords is not surprising, and was part of a European sigillographic tradition of the representation of power. It has been proposed that in early and high medieval Europe the motif on a seal

(London, 1897), pp. 9–10; G. T. Clark (ed.), *Cartae et Alia Munimenta quae ad Dominium de Glamorgancia Pertinent*, 6 vols (Cardiff, 1910), II, no. 346; Patterson, *Scriptorium*, no. 53; Pryce, *Acts*, pp. 258–9; *Seals in Context*, no. 27.

²⁰ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 11; Birch, *Margam Abbey*, pp. 21–2. Patterson, *Scriptorium*, p. 69 and no. 11, dates the charter to 'poss. 1175 × 79'. It is interesting to note that Gunnilda's grant was validated by the cathedral seals, even though her husband, father-in-law and son all possessed seals that they used to authenticate documents relating to Margam Abbey.

²¹ Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, esp. pp. 59–71.

was designed so that it could be interpreted by a wide audience through the employment of a limited range of iconographic types, with accompanying wording (the 'legend') acting as the prime individual identifier.²² Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, who has done perhaps the most extensive work on the concepts of European seals and sealing in the high Middle Ages, has noted that, in the eleventh to mid-thirteenth centuries, 'images on seals are stereotypic. They sort and classify by socio-economic categories.'²³ In France, the representation of an armed horseman was adopted as a sigillographic image by men at all levels of the aristocracy as these groups started to become active sealers in the later eleventh century.²⁴ It has been suggested that this choice of design reflected both the actual superiority of cavalry over foot-soldiers, and of the Christian ideology of the mounted warrior as an embodiment of the triumph of Christianity over paganism (and, from the ninth century, Islam) and of virtue over evil.²⁵ Although other images such as castles, hunting motifs and canting devices appear on the seals of the French aristocracy in the eleventh to mid-thirteenth centuries, in the period up to 1180 over 99 per cent of male aristocrats in France employed the image of a mounted warrior on their seals.²⁶ It therefore is not surprising that in England the earliest non-royal male secular sealers adopted the armed equestrian image.²⁷ Neither is it surprising

²² Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'Towns and seals: representation and signification in medieval France', in Brian Pullen and S. Reynolds (eds), *Town Life and Culture in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 34–47 (p. 34).

²³ Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'In search of a semiotic paradigm: the matter of sealing in medieval thought', in Noël Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson (eds), *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals* (London, 2008), pp. 1–7 (p. 2).

²⁴ Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'The social implication of the art of chivalry: the sigillographic evidence (France 1050–1250)', in E. R. Haymes (ed.), *The Medieval Court in Europe*, Houston Germanic Studies 6 (Munich, 1986), pp. 142–75, reprinted in Bedos-Rezak, *Form and Order in Medieval France*, section IV, pp. 1–31, esp. pp. 1–8, 23.

²⁵ Bedos-Rezak, 'The social implication of the art of chivalry', pp. 3–8. Bedos-Rezak notes that the medieval image of the mounted warrior ultimately was influenced by Roman models.

²⁶ Brigitte Bedos Rezak, 'Medieval seals and the structure of chivalric society', in Howell Chickering and Thomas H. Seiler (eds), *The Study of Chivalry: Resources and Approaches* (Kalamazoo, 1988), pp. 313–72 (p. 330).

²⁷ As in France, the principal motif adopted for the seals of queens and noble women in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century England and Wales was the image of a finely dressed woman, often holding a lily or bird. See Susan M. Johns,

Figure 1. First equestrian seal of Morgan ap Caradog (d.c.1208), lord of Afan; actual size 50 mm. National Library of Wales, Penrice & Margam Ch. 54, undated, 1175 × 1200. Photograph: author. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales.



that not only the greater magnates but the lesser nobility had begun to use equestrian seals by the 1140s.²⁸ This motif became firmly established across Britain and continued to be employed by noble men into the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁹

In Wales, the earliest extant impressions of the seals of native secular seal-owners are those of Cadell ap Gruffudd, Maredudd ap Hywel

Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-century Anglo-Norman Realm (Manchester and New York, 2003), esp. chapter 7; Elizabeth Danbury, 'Queens and powerful women: image and authority', in Adams, Cherry and Robinson (eds), *Good Impressions*, pp. 17–24, esp. pp. 17–18; Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (New York, 2009).

²⁸ David Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000–1300* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 242–3; Adrian Ailes, 'The knight's alter ego: from equestrian to armorial seal', in Adams, Cherry and Robinson (eds), *Good Impressions*, pp. 8–11, esp. pp. 8–9.

²⁹ Crouch, *Image of Aristocracy*, pp. 242–3; Ailes, 'The knight's alter ego', pp. 8–9, 11. Crouch and Ailes both note that in the later twelfth century the greater magnates also began to employ heraldic seals in an effort to differentiate themselves from the lesser nobility.

Figure 2. Seal of Payne (III) de Turberville (d.c.1208); actual size 57 mm. National Library of Wales, Penrice & Margam Ch. 41, undated, 1186 × 1191. Photograph: author. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales.



(fl. 1142–76), lord of Edeirnion and Morgan ap Caradog (d.c.1208), lord of Afan.³⁰

All three employ the equestrian motif, and since their owners came from, respectively, south-western, north-eastern and southern Wales, this indicates that the use of the image was a national rather than regional phenomenon from the outset. Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (c.1172–1240) is the first prince of Gwynedd for whom an extant seal has been identified, and his seal also displays the equestrian motif.³¹ Michael Powell Siddons identified twenty-one men from native ruling families who employed the equestrian motif on their seals in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, again demonstrating the broad appeal of this image.³² Nor was this motif restricted to the Welsh rulers: the mounted warrior also appears on the seals of a number of Anglo-Norman lords in this

³⁰ Michael Powell Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 23 (1983–4), 292–318 (292); Pryce, *Acts*, nos 482, 121; *Seals in Context*, no. 18.

³¹ Pryce, *Acts*, p. 86; *Seals in Context*, no. 18.

³² Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', A I–XI, XIII–XXII.

period.³³ It was also used by men active in both the southern and eastern Marches.³⁴ Indeed, so familiar was the equestrian figure as a motif on noble seals in Wales and the Marches that, as in England, the familiar image was on occasion subtly subverted for a particular purpose.³⁵ Payne (III) de Turberville (d.c.1208), who held the lordship of Coity in Glamorgan, had two equestrian seals, both diverging from the standard format.³⁶ The first is damaged, but shows a horseman either blowing a horn or holding a hawk (the former is far more likely because of the position of the horseman's arm). The figure represented on Payne's second seal is also blowing a horn, but in his right hand holds up a sprig of foliage.³⁷

At first glance, therefore, the motif is the familiar equestrian one, but on closer inspection it reveals something unusual. While the motif of an equestrian huntsman blowing a horn or hawking was used by some noblemen in the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, in this instance we seem to have an image with meaning specific to the seal-owner.³⁸ The decision to depict a hunting-horn and branch rather than

³³ Ibid., B II–X. The Seals in Medieval Wales project has identified ten additional owners of equestrian seals from the Marches and border counties in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: Adam de Somery, [London,] B[ritish] L[ibrary], Harley ch. 75 D 7, 75 D 8; Alexander de Winest, [Hereford,] H[ereford] C[athedral] A[rchives], 227; Geoffrey Uvertun, NLW, Pitchford Hall Deeds 1421; Hamo son of Marscot, NLW, Pitchford Hall Deeds 1248, 1249; Henry de la Pomerai, HCA, 800, 1604, and [Shrewsbury,] Shropshire Archives, Oakley Park Deeds 20/6/2; Hugh Picford, NLW, Pitchford Hall Deeds 1414; Robert de Berckelay (Berkeley), HCA, no. 797; Thomas Costentin, NLW, Pitchford Hall Deeds 1416; Vivian de Roshale, Shropshire Archives, Acton Reynald, 322/2/16, Walter de Clifford, Shropshire Archives, Acton Reynald, 322/2/8.

³⁴ Among the earliest known Anglo-Norman equestrian seal owners from the Marches is Gilbert (I) de Turberville, active in Glamorgan in the mid-twelfth century: Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', B VII.

³⁵ In an English context, David Crouch has highlighted that the equestrian figure on the seal of Geoffrey, seneschal and sheriff of Leicester in the mid-twelfth century and nicknamed 'the abbot', holds a crosier rather than a sword or lance: David Crouch, 'Humour and identity in the twelfth century', in Adrian P. Tudor and Alan Hindley (eds), *Grant Rise? The Medieval Comic Presence*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 11 (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 213–24.

³⁶ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 8, 41, 42; Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', no. IX, 1 & 2.

³⁷ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 41 (complete), 42 (chipped). Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', B. IX, 2, proposed that this was a 'lily-like plant'.

³⁸ Bedos-Rezak, 'The social implication of the art of chivalry', p. 5; Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide*, p. 46 and fig. 40; John McEwan, 'Horses, horsemen, and

the usual sword and shield is perhaps best explained by the fact that the Turbeville family held the lordship of Coity by serjeantry of hunting, while the name Coity derives from Welsh *coed* ('wood'), with the woodland forming a key feature of the lordship.³⁹

The use of the equestrian warrior as the image on the seals of powerful men in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Wales was part of an established international semiotic discourse, and the images on seals from Gwynedd or Gwent made them to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from those from Surrey, Yorkshire, Champagne or Normandy.⁴⁰ Indeed, the adoption of the equestrian motif is perhaps best understood as a facet of the 'Europeanization' of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a subject of lively scholarly debate which recently has been considered in a specifically Welsh context.⁴¹ As a form of transnational propaganda the equestrian seal had little parallel and

hunting: leading Londoners and equestrian seals in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 22 (2005), 77–93, esp. 85–6.

³⁹ J. Beverley Smith, 'The kingdom of Morgannwg and the Norman Conquest of Glamorgan', in T. B. Pugh (ed.), *Glamorgan County History*, vol. III: *The Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 1–44 (pp. 22–3); Max Lieberman, 'Anglicization in high medieval Wales: the case of Glamorgan', ante, 23, 1 (2006), 1–26 (9, 13). Lieberman suggests that the woodland of Coity was a key feature of the lordship both because of the hunting it afforded and because it formed the boundary which separated Coity from Blaenau Morgannwg. It is also interesting to consider the hunting-horn depicted on the seal in the broader context of symbolic objects, including horns, associated with types of vassalage. See John Cherry, 'Symbolism and survival: medieval horns of tenure', *Antiquaries Journal*, 69 (1989), 111–18.

⁴⁰ David Crouch states that 'in the absence of heraldry, there is nothing to distinguish native Welsh from English seals': *Image of Aristocracy*, p. 246. For French equestrian seals, see Bedos-Rezak, 'Medieval seals', pp. 330–1; for equestrian seals in a region of France, see Jean-Luc Chassel (ed.), *Sceaux et usages de sceaux. Images de la Champagne médiévale* (Paris, 2003), esp. pp. 102–5.

⁴¹ Central to the debate is Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, 1993). For Wales, see A. D. Carr, 'Inside the tent looking out: the medieval Welsh world-view', in R. R. Davies and Geraint H. Jenkins (eds), *From Medieval to Modern Wales: Historical Essays in Honour of Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph A. Griffiths* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 30–44, and Huw Pryce, 'Welsh rulers and European change, c.1100–1282', in Huw Pryce and John Watts (eds), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 37–51 (pp. 37, 40). Chris Wickham has recently offered an interesting perspective on this issue, suggesting that Wales should be explored in relation to specific geo-political factors, especially other 'mountain societies' across medieval Europe: Chris Wickham, 'Medieval Wales and European history', ante, 25, 2 (2010), 201–8, esp. 204–8.

conveniently reflected several different facets of leadership, since the mounted figure was strong in battle but also represented the willingness to act as a protector of those who owed him allegiance.

While the equestrian motif crossed geographic and political boundaries, there may have been factors that made it a particularly attractive image within Wales. Rees Davies memorably highlighted the 'centrality of status' in medieval Welsh society, and seals, a medium that provided a new vehicle for expressing gradations in status, may have been an especially welcome innovation.⁴² The equestrian design was an ideal representation for the militarized nobility, the 'horse-riding companions of kings and princes'.⁴³ Furthermore, it is worth reflecting here on the breeding of increasingly large horses by the Welsh high nobility in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as attested by Gerald of Wales and the court poets, something that would appear to have been connected as much with social status as with military concerns.⁴⁴

While the most prevalent motif, the equestrian figure was not the only image found on the seals of the nobility – the native Welsh rulers and *uchelwyr*, and Anglo-Norman barons, knights and the wealthier settlers – in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Wales and the Marches. Most of the motifs on the seals of men of this status were an adaptation of the same idea behind the equestrian figure: the representation of a human figure with the dress and accoutrements pertaining to a specific status or office, in line with Bedos-Rezak's thesis.⁴⁵ Good examples are the finely engraved mid- to late twelfth-century seal of Geoffrey Sturmy and that of his grandson Roger junior.⁴⁶

⁴² R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063–1415* (new edn, Oxford, 2000), p. 115.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–18.

⁴⁴ M. E. Owen, 'The animals of the Law of Hywel', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, 45 (2009), 5–28 (21, 23); Nerys Ann Jones, 'Horses in medieval Welsh court poetry', in Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (eds), *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 82–101 (pp. 90–1). I am grateful to Morfydd Owen for drawing my attention to the particular significance of the horse for the native Welsh nobility. In contrast, David Crouch emphasizes the influence of Norman practice on the military use of horses on the Welsh military elite: *Image of Aristocracy*, pp. 156–9.

⁴⁵ Bedos-Rezak, 'In search of a semiotic paradigm', p. 2; eadem, *When Ego Was Imago*, esp. pp. 152–9, 251–2.

⁴⁶ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 1978 and 1979; Patterson, *Scriptorium of Margam Abbey*, Appendix II, nos 186–7; *Seals in Context*, nos 31, 33.

Figure 3. Seal of Geoffrey Sturmy; actual size 68 × 44 mm. National Library of Wales, Penrice & Margam Ch. 1978, undated, 1150 × 1175. Photograph: author. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales.



Geoffrey was an Anglo-Norman who established a settlement on previously uncultivated land in the fee of Kenfig and built a chapel in the parish of Newcastle (Bridgend).⁴⁷ The seals of both Geoffrey and Roger junior depict a man in a short tunic, holding a spear and blowing a horn. The civilian dress, large broad-bladed spear and horn clearly identify these figures as representing a hunter or forester, and it has been suggested that this image may allude to Geoffrey's clearance of 'waste' land.⁴⁸ Another figure in civilian dress, this time apparently representing

⁴⁷ F. G. Cowley, 'The church in medieval Glamorgan', in Pugh (ed.), *Glamorgan County History*, pp. 87–166 (pp. 116–17); Patterson, *Scriptorium*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ David H. Williams, *Images of Welsh History: Seals in the National Library of Wales* (Aberystwyth, 2007), p. 15; McEwan and New (eds), *Seals in Context*,

Figure 4. Seal of Gilbert Burdin; actual size 59 × 37 mm. British Library, Harley Ch. 75 B 26, undated, 1200 × 1225. Photograph: John McEwan. Reproduced with the permission of the British Library.



a particular office, is found on the seal of Gilbert Burdin, impressions of which were appended to two Margam Abbey documents of the first quarter of the thirteenth century.⁴⁹

The image is of a man in a short tunic stepping into the ‘frame’ of the seal, holding up a carefully rendered object which dominates the design field. That this is a rod of office seems clear from the image, but what is most striking about it is that it most closely corresponds to the rod of office held by the *penteulu* (‘captain of the military household’) depicted

pp. 79–80. The image may also allude to the wider Sturmy family, members of which had held lands in Severnake Forest (Wilts.) since at least 1086 and were hereditary wardens of the royal forest: ‘Royal forests’, *A History of the County of Wiltshire*, vol. 4 (1959), pp. 391–433 (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=102825>; accessed 21 July 2012).

⁴⁹ BL, Harley ch. 75 B 26; BL, Harley ch. 75 B 27.

Figure 5. Depiction of the *penteulu* in the mid-thirteenth-century Welsh lawbook, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 28, fol. 3r. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales.



in the mid-thirteenth-century illustrated text of the laws of Hywel Dda now comprising National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 28.⁵⁰

Apart from his remarkable seal, Gilbert has left no discernible trace in the historical record except for the grants of land to Margam Abbey that he made in conjunction with his wife Agnes and brothers Geoffrey and William. In the extant documents relating to Gilbert Burdin all the witnesses have French or Anglo-Norman names, strongly suggesting that Gilbert was not a member of a Welsh family using an Anglo-Norman name, but an incomer without any obvious connections with the native ruling families or *uchelwyr*. Why Gilbert was represented on his seal by a figure that so closely resembles the depiction of an important Welsh office-holder is a puzzle which raises a number of questions and demands further investigation.

⁵⁰ NLW, Peniarth MS 28, fol. 3r; Daniel Huws, *Peniarth 28: Illustrations from a Welsh Lawbook* (Aberystwyth, 1988), fig. 4. In Anglo-Norman society, the rod of office appears to have been restricted to the very highest levels; see Crouch, *Image of Aristocracy*, pp. 211–14.



All the seals with the representation of the human form discussed above functioned within the accepted paradigms of an image classified by social category, office or occupation, even if some operated within very specific parameters.⁵¹ The first seal of Lleision ap Morgan goes beyond this representation by social category, however, and may even be a visual record of a specific act. Why did Lleision choose to employ a seal that operated in such a different manner? Did this matter? And what can this tell us about the ways in which seals were adopted in Wales, and the wider implications this has for an understanding of medieval Welsh society?

Lleision ap Morgan is not a prominent figure in the history of medieval Wales, overshadowed by his father, immortalized as Gerald of Wales's guide across the River Neath, and his brother, a thorn in the side of the Anglo-Norman lords of Glamorgan.⁵² Indeed, without his seals to distinguish him, Lleision would not stand out even within his own family. Lleision's father, Morgan ap Caradog ab Iestyn (d.c.1208), was the nephew of Rhys ap Gruffudd of Deheubarth (the Lord Rhys), in whose company he attended the Council of Gloucester in 1175, and who as lord of Afan exercised considerable power in his own right within *Gwlad Morgan*.⁵³ Following the death of William earl of Gloucester in November 1183 Morgan ap Caradog appears to have led a rising against the Anglo-Normans.⁵⁴ He has been described as the 'paramount ruler' of the hill country of Glamorgan in the last quarter of the twelfth century.⁵⁵

⁵¹ From the late twelfth century onwards, an increasing number of personal seals (those used by an individual in a private capacity) in Wales, as in England, had as a motif a pattern or a representation, often highly stylized, of an animal, plant, object or celestial body. While forming the largest category of seal motif, those with patterns and stylized representations of plants, etc. have to date received the least attention from scholars. Such motifs are discussed in a Welsh context in Johns, McEwan, New and Schofield, *Seals and Society*, and in Elizabeth A. New, 'Conformity and divergence: a case-study of the motifs on personal seals in medieval Wales', in P. R. Schofield (ed.), *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages* (forthcoming).

⁵² Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 26, 30–1, 36–9, 41; Michael Altschul, 'The lordship of Glamorgan and Morgannwg, 1217–1317', in Pugh (ed.), *Glamorgan County History*, pp. 45–86 (46–7); Pryce, *Acts*, pp. 20–1.

⁵³ Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 36; Pryce, *Acts*, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 37; Pryce, *Acts*, pp. 19–20.

⁵⁵ Matthew Griffiths, 'Native society on the Anglo-Norman frontier: the evidence of the Margam charters', ante, 14, 2 (1988), 179–216 (182).

Morgan had four sons, of whom Lleision was the eldest; Owain appears to have been Morgan's second son, with younger brothers Cadwallon and Morgan Gam.⁵⁶

The date of Lleision's birth is unknown, but he was named in grants and confirmations issued by his father as early as 1189.⁵⁷ Lleision issued grants and confirmations to Margam Abbey in his own right from 1199 and commanded a troop of Welshmen in the service of King John in 1204.⁵⁸ Morgan ap Caradog died in c.1208 and it seems that Lleision succeeded him as lord of Afan, dying apparently without issue by c.1217.⁵⁹

Thanks to Huw Pryce's meticulous work on the documents issued by members of the Welsh ruling families before the Edwardian Conquest, the dating and sequence of the documents validated by Lleision is reasonably clear and it is possible to plot his seal usage with some confidence. Lleision did not possess a seal of his own in September 1200, but had one by 1203.⁶⁰ He was in possession of a second seal at roughly the same date (c.1203), and a third seal possibly in 1205 and certainly by 1208.⁶¹ Having more than one seal, either simultaneously or in succession, was not particularly unusual for a nobleman in the early thirteenth century. What evidence from late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Wales does suggest is that, when an individual is known to have possessed more than one seal in succession, the principal motif usually remained the same. For example, Lleision's father Morgan ap Caradog had two seals, both equestrian.⁶² However, the choice of motif on Lleision's seals did not follow this pattern.

Lleision's first seal, the impression identified by an inscription on the tag as *de primo sigillo* ('from the first seal') in each case, is the most complex.⁶³ It depicts a man in civilian dress kneeling before a seated

⁵⁶ Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 39; Pryce, *Acts*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Pryce, *Acts*, no. 124. Lleision and his brother Owain assented to the grant issued by Morgan ap Caradog 29 August 1189 x October 1203.

⁵⁸ Pryce, *Acts*, p. 20 and no. 165.

⁵⁹ Pryce, *Acts*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 2026; Pryce, *Acts*, pp. 113–14 and no. 153.

⁶¹ Pryce, *Acts*, pp. 113–14. I am grateful to Dr Susan Davies for her comments on the charters to which Lleision's seals are attached.

⁶² NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 54 (first seal), 59, 85–93, 95, 100, 1706, 2003, 2017, 2019–23, 2025, 2026; Pryce, *Acts*, p. 112–13; Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', nos I 1, I 2.

⁶³ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch., 110b, 111, 112; BL, Harley ch. 75 C 34; Pryce, *Acts*, p. 113, nos 154–5, 163–4. See also n. 75 below.

Figure 6. First seal of Lleision ap Morgan (d.c.1217); actual size 54 mm. National Library of Wales, Penrice & Margam Ch. 111, undated, 1208 × 1217. Photograph: author. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales.



figure who has his hand raised in blessing, a design which, it has been proposed, may represent Lleision and the abbot of Margam.⁶⁴ There are other possible interpretations of the seated figure. It could be the Virgin Mary, to whom Margam was dedicated, although the figure does not fit any standard form of Marian iconography.⁶⁵ Michael Siddons firmly stated that Lleision was kneeling before ‘an abbess’, for the head-covering of the seated figure does in one impression appear to be similar to a wimple.⁶⁶ If the seated figure is an abbess, could this indicate Lleision’s otherwise unknown patronage of a female house? It is also possible that the seated figure is an embodiment of

⁶⁴ Pryce, *Acts*, p. 113. Pryce does, however, note that the abbatial seal of Margam depicts the abbot standing rather than seated and, indeed, it was rare for English or Welsh ecclesiastical seals to show a living person sitting down, the enthroned image generally being reserved for saints or the deity.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of Marian imagery in a sigillographic context see T. A. Heslop, ‘The Virgin Mary’s regalia and twelfth century English seals’, in Alan Borg and Andrew Martindale (eds), *The Vanishing Past: Studies in Medieval Art, Liturgy and Metrology presented to Christopher Hohler*, British Archaeological Reports International Series III (Oxford, 1981), pp. 53–62.

⁶⁶ Siddons, ‘Welsh equestrian seals’, 295; Siddons here misidentifies Lleision as

ecclesiastical or monastic authority, although this would be quite unusual. David H. Williams suggested that the figure is the bishop of Llandaff, and a bishop is perhaps the most satisfactory interpretation for the figure; the head-covering certainly could be an archaic mitre with a low crown and transverse lappets.⁶⁷ Although the figure does not appear to be nimbed, several episcopal saints associated with southern Wales present themselves for consideration in this context, including Dyfrig, Samson and Teilo, the latter with connections to the rulers of Morgannwg.⁶⁸ A final question is what is being held in the figure's left hand. A book with an elaborate binding was suggested by Siddons and Pryce, while Williams proposed that it is a charter with pendent seals.

But what message is the image meant to convey? Lleision and his father swore an oath on Margam's relics in the 1190s, an act witnessed by Henry of Abergavenny, bishop of Llandaff (d.1218), and it may be this event that is commemorated by the unusual imagery.⁶⁹ If so, this is a highly sophisticated image, for the seal would then be depicted within its own image. While this is possible, the form and posture of the seated figure have close parallels with a number of near-contemporary depictions of saints, including those on a font from Lancaur (Gloucestershire; previously Monmouthshire), the seals of Gloucester Abbey and Great Malvern Priory, and the stone carving of Christ in Majesty from Llandaff Cathedral.⁷⁰ This, combined with the suppliant attitude of the kneeling figure, suggests that the image is intended as more than the literal record of a single occurrence. This interpretation of

his namesake nephew. The head-covering of the seated figure in the impression on BL, Harley ch. 75 C 34 looks much more like a wimple than it does on the NLW Penrice & Margam ch. 110–12 impressions.

⁶⁷ Williams, *Images of Welsh History*, p. 21; Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London, 1984), pp. 157–9.

⁶⁸ David E. Thornton, 'Teilo (*supp. fl. c.550*)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27104>, accessed 24 August 2012). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for suggesting St Teilo as a possible candidate.

⁶⁹ Pryce, *Acts*, no. 132, NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 89.

⁷⁰ George Zarnecki, Janet Holt and Tristram Holland (eds), *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200* (London, 1984), nos 243 (font, now in Gloucester Cathedral), 350 (first seal of Gloucester Abbey), 352 (seal of Great Malvern Priory); Peter Lord, *The Visual Culture of Wales: Medieval Vision* (Cardiff, 2003), p. 190 and fig. 297 (Llandaff Christ in Majesty). The model(s) for the image on Lleision's seal raise extremely interesting and important questions about agency that are considered in Johns, McEwan, New and Schofield, *Seals and Society*.

the image makes good sense, since Lleision made and confirmed several gifts to the abbey and swore on Margam's relics on a number of other occasions.⁷¹ Moreover, oath-taking was of great importance in Welsh law, was regularly recorded in eleventh-century Welsh charters and remained a feature of the act of confirmation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁷² As such, from a cultural perspective Lleision would have had good reason to think that the representation of oath-swearing in conjunction with a pious act would have been a suitable image for his first foray into the world of seal ownership.

Lleision's other two seals are far more conventional. His second seal, impressions of which are again clearly identified as such through notes on the seal tags, has an equestrian image and was in use at roughly the same time as the first, religious, one.⁷³ Indeed, the style of the images and letterforms of the legend suggest that Lleision's first two seals may have been engraved by the same craftsman, although it is interesting to note that the equestrian seal is significantly smaller than the 'religious' one.⁷⁴ It is quite possible that, as Morgan's eldest son leading troops to a royal muster, Lleision required a more martial design than that afforded by his unusual first seal. Lleision's third seal is also equestrian, and he was using it possibly as early as September 1205 and certainly by February 1208.⁷⁵ This third seal is larger than the second seal and almost as big as the first one, although the matrix was almost certainly made by a different craftsman than the previous two.

In the absence of contracts, accounts or other firm evidence it is impossible categorically to state that Lleision was closely involved with

⁷¹ BL, Harley ch. 75 C 34, NLW, Penrice & Margam Roll 2093/2, NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 2026, NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 112; Pryce, *Acts*, nos 155, 152, 153, 154.

⁷² Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 39, 41; Crouch, 'Earliest original charter', p. 129. Oaths feature in seventy-two of the acts of the Welsh rulers: Pryce, *Acts*, index, sub 'oaths'.

⁷³ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 109, 110a; Pryce, *Acts*, p. 113; Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', no. A IV, 1.

⁷⁴ Lleision's first seal is 54 mm in diameter, his second seal only 38 mm in diameter. Pryce, *Acts*, p. 113, describes this second seal as oval, but in fact the oval appearance is a result of part of the handle of the matrix having been impressed at the top.

⁷⁵ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 106, 107, 108, 2027, 2030, 2031; BL, Harley ch. 75 C 35; Pryce, *Acts* pp. 113–14, nos 157–9, 165–8; Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', no. A IV, 2.

Figure 7. Second seal of Lleision ap Morgan (d.c.1217); actual size 38 mm. National Library of Wales, Penrice & Margam Ch. 109, undated, 1203 × 1205. Photograph: author. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales.



designing his seals. Nevertheless, the imagery on his first seal is so unusual that it is almost inconceivable that Lleision did not have some direct input into its creation. His other seals are, as noted, conventional in design, the generic equestrian figure identifying Lleision as a member of a certain social group rather than presenting an individualized image. However, this in itself is most interesting, and implies that Lleision or someone on his behalf made the deliberate decision to choose a seal that represented him in these ways.

The image on Lleision's first seals does not, as noted, fit within the standard types found on secular seals of this date. This seal could have been made by or at the request of Margam Abbey, but almost certainly was commissioned by Lleision himself. What is clear is that there was some unease about it. All extant documents validated by this seal have been labelled by a clerk of Margam Abbey to clarify that the impression is from the first seal.⁷⁶ Two of these documents validated with Lleision's first seal were subsequently copied and the 'new' deed validated with his

⁷⁶ In each case Patterson has identified the hand of the endorsements as different from, although more or less contemporary with, those of the main text: Patterson, *Scriptorium*, for example nos 101–8.

second, equestrian, seal.⁷⁷ His final confirmation to Margam explicitly states that it is authenticated with his current seal – that is, his third matrix – but that he previously had validated documents with two earlier seals.⁷⁸ It may be proposed that the image on Lleision's first seal caused concern because it did not categorize in the usual manner, and that its imagery created anxiety and prompted (and perhaps even forced) Lleision to acquire a new matrix with an image that better fitted the expected paradigms of identifying by social status. This offers an insight into an individual's adapting to a new medium and technology, since the sealed instrument was a recent innovation and Lleision's father one of the very first native Welshmen (as far as we can tell) to own a seal for the purposes of validation.

While Lleision's seals are fascinating in their own right, they may also provide important information about his family, and in particular how Morgan ap Caradog and his sons adapted to their position on the frontier of Anglo-Norman settlement by consolidating dynastic holdings.⁷⁹ J. Beverley Smith suggested that Morgan ap Caradog had by 1175 absorbed the patrimony of Caradog ab Iestyn into his own lordship and established some degree of authority over his brothers. Smith further proposed that Morgan may have been one of the Welsh rulers who 'endeavoured to obviate the practice of partible succession in so far as it applied to the lordship'.⁸⁰ This was not, however, because he was in any way enamoured of English practices, but in order to help oppose Anglo-Norman domination.

Seals appear to support the argument that Morgan ap Caradog favoured a form of primogeniture. Morgan had two equestrian seals, appropriate for his status as lord of Afan and the dominant power in the kinship group.⁸¹ By contrast, Morgan's younger brother Maredudd is

⁷⁷ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 109, 110b; Pryce, *Acts*, nos 155, 164.

⁷⁸ BL, Harley ch. 75 C 35; Pryce, *Acts*, no. 168.

⁷⁹ Griffiths, 'Native society on the Anglo-Norman frontier', is an important investigation of the complex patterns of land-holding and kinship among the native nobility in the Margam area. For a longer view of shifting patterns of power in the region, see David Crouch, 'The slow death of kingship in Glamorgan, 1067–1158', *Morgannwg*, 29 (1985), 20–41. Here Crouch makes important points about the cooperation between native rulers and the Normans, and the persistence of native rule in Glamorgan and Gwent.

⁸⁰ Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 36.

⁸¹ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 54 (first seal), 59, 85–93, 95, 100, 1706, 2003, 2017, 2019–23, 2025, 2026; Pryce, *Acts*, pp. 112–13; Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', nos A I, 1, I, 2.

known only to have used a seal with a radial device, despite inheriting lands of his own.⁸² Morgan's eldest son Lleision used three seals, the first, with a 'religious' image, soon replaced by one with an equestrian motif seemingly related to Lleision's adoption of greater responsibility within the kinship group, and quite possibly as a visual endorsement of his place as Morgan's heir. Morgan ap Caradog's younger son Owain is known to have had two seals, the first, in use before 1208, showing a hand holding a spear with a pennon, and the second, impressed sometime between 1208 and 1217, with an equestrian design.⁸³ Lleision may have died as early as 1214 and was certainly dead by 1217, so this change to an equestrian seal might well have been a statement, as Huw Pryce suggests, of Owain's inheritance.⁸⁴ Morgan ap Caradog's fourth son, Morgan Gam, used three seals. The first, whose impressions suggest low-quality engraving of the matrix, has a stylized lily motif, and dates from about 1217–18, while the second and third, both with equestrian designs, were in use by at least 1234.⁸⁵ Once again the equestrian design was a later choice, apparently connected with Morgan Gam's inheritance of the lordship.

The seals used by Morgan ap Caradog's family provide interesting food for thought. They appear to be expressing not only the status of their owners in the context of society as a whole – all seals of this period did this – but also the status of their owner within his kinship group. Indeed, it is satisfactorily explained as a visual acknowledgement of precedence, further evidence of Smith's suggestion that Morgan ap Caradog rejected partibility of his lordship. In a broader context, the seals of Lleision and his family offer us an insight into how people engaged with a new medium for expression and exchange, demonstrating the rapid acculturation of native Welsh society to one that not only used seals, but one that was highly 'literate' in sigillographic terms.

A close investigation of the seals of Lleision ap Morgan thus provides a glimpse, not available through the documentary record, of personal

⁸² BL, Harley ch. 75 B. 28; Pryce, *Acts*, p. 113, no. 150.

⁸³ BL, Harley ch. 75 C 36 (first seal); NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 2032, 2033; Pryce, *Acts*, p. 113, nos 170–1.

⁸⁴ Pryce, *Acts*, p. 113.

⁸⁵ NLW, Penrice & Margam ch. 2035 (stylized lily design), 1973 (first equestrian design), 73 and BL, Harley ch. 75 C 71 (second equestrian design); Pryce, *Acts*, p. 114, nos 175–7, 181; Siddons, 'Welsh equestrian seals', nos III, 1, III, 2.

concerns and the expression of identity, and the apparent pressure to conform to established semiotic paradigms when designing seals. The seals of Lleision's father and brothers reveal further insights into a society adapting to rapidly changing circumstances. And even a brief contextualization of a small group of seals demonstrates that this material can add considerably to our understanding of Wales in the Middle Ages.

ELIZABETH A. NEW

Aberystwyth University